# The Jerseyman

## Veterans Day Tribute to Dr. Thomas Banit for His Oral History Service Aboard the Battleship New Jersey

*Ron Gottardi, Director, Battleship New Jersey Oral History Program*

Professor Emeritus Dr. Thomas Banit was honored for his founding and direction of the Oral History Program of the Battleship *New Jersey* (BB-62) by the Board of Trustees of the ship during Veterans Day ceremonies aboard the ship on November 11, 2014. Dr. Banit is also a veteran, having served as a U.S. Marine Corps officer in Vietnam.

The oral history program was started in 2000 by Dr. Banit, while he was professor of history and education at Kean University in New Jersey. Dr. Banit has retired from the position of Director of the program and reduced his volunteer hours in preparation for a move to New Hampshire.

A certificate of appreciation for his service as founder and Director of the Oral History Program of the Battleship *New Jersey* was presented to Dr. Banit by several members of the Board of Trustees of the Battleship New Jersey, including John Ryan, Chairman, Captain Walter Urban, USN (Ret.), Vice-Chairman. Dennis Levitt, the Honorable Patricia Egan Jones, and Philip Rowan, CEO and Executive Director of the Battleship New Jersey.

The text on the Certificate of Appreciation from the Board of Trustees of the Battleship *New Jersey* presented to Dr. Thomas Banit reads: УBattleship *New Jersey* Museum and Memorial, Certificate of Appreciation, presented Nov. 11, 2014 to Dr. Thomas Banit, with deep respect and appreciation for the professional direction and financial support he has so generously contributed to the Battleship *New Jersey* Oral History Department, signed by Phil Rowan, CEO and Executive Director of the Battleship New Jersey, and John Ryan, Chairman, Board of Trustees.Ф

A joint legislative commendation was also presented to Dr. Thomas Banit by State Senator and U.S. Congressman-elect Donald Norcross, Уfor his many contributions to the battleship New Jersey MuseumTs oral history programEФ This commendation was signed by Senator Norcross, and Angel Fuentes and Gilbert Wilson, members of the General Assembly of the State of New Jersey.

The Oral History Program is comprised of volunteers on the Battleship *New Jersey* Museum and Memorial who interview former servicemen and women and preserve their narratives. The program has completed over 300 recordings of interviews with U.S. military veterans since it started in 2000.

Oral History is a recorded interview of an eyewitness to history, told in the witnessT own words. The program specializes in military veterans. Most of the veteransT stories are video recorded (some are audio only). Many of the interview subjects are U.S. Navy veterans, but also includes members of other U.S. armed forces, civilian workers and museum volunteers. The program specializes in veterans of the Battleship New Jersey, but crew members of other vessels tell their stories as well. Interviewees include veterans from World War II, the Korean conflict, the Vietnam War, conflict in the Middle East, the recent wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, and the intervening years.

УThis collection,Ф says Dr. Banit, Уwas built over 14 years with all-volunteer interviewers, videographers, transcribers, abstractors, indexers, and historians.  We will continue to interview veterans and add to the

collection, which is now considered the largest oral history archive of over 200 historic ship museums in the world.Φ

Ron Gottardi will succeed Dr. Banit as director of the program. He has been assistant director of the program since 2010. He has also served as a docent aboard BB-62 and has developed educational programs and exhibits for the Battleship since joining its volunteer crew in 2008. УDr. BanitTs Marine Corps boots,Φ says Gottardi, Уare impossible to fill, but his exemplary dedication, generosity, and integrity will be well remembered and inspiring to us all.Φ

Asked how he feels about leaving the program, Dr. Banit replied, УI am particularly pleased that my last official act as Director was to turn over a copy of our collection to The New Jersey State Library in Trenton. This will make these historical documents and recordings much more accessible to historians, researchers, teachers, students, and the general public.Φ

Researchers will be able to search an on-line database for specific topics and then view or listen to interviews on DVD or CD players at the State Library. Some of the videos may be available on-line later depending on permissions granted in the releases signed by the interviewees.

Some of the recordings are in a searchable on-line database of the Veterans History Project of the Library of Congress in Washington DC.

Included with the battleship collection are transcripts and audio tapes of interviews by CDR Paul Stillwell, USNR (ret.), noted naval historian, generated during research on his book, *Battleship New Jersey: An Illustrated History*, Annapolis MD: Naval Institute Press, 1986. Stillwell served as an officer aboard BB-62 in 1969. These items are also searchable in the BB-62 Oral History database. Stillwell was a featured speaker in the recent Veterans Day ceremonies on the Battleship New Jersey.

Asked why oral history is important, Dr. Banit replied, УFor the same reason history is important. As William H. McNeill put it in *Why Study History* (1985), CHistorical knowledge is no more and no less than carefully and critically constructed collective memory. As such it can both make us wiser in our public choices and more richly human in our private lives.T And oral history is the true record of history, as told by the witnesses to the events.Φ

For more information, to volunteer to be interviewed, to help, or to contribute to the Oral History Program of the Battleship New Jersey, contact: Ron Gottardi, Director, email address: *oralhistory@battleshipnewjersey.org*, tel: (866) 877-6262 (toll free) x222. For more information on their programs, visit *www.njstatelib.org* (New Jersey State Library) or *www.loc.gov/vets/* (Veterans History Project, Library of Congress).

*A Certificate of Appreciation for his service as Director of the Oral History Program of the Battleship New Jersey is presented to Dr. Thomas Banit (left) by members of the Board of Trustees of the Battleship New Jersey, (right from Dr. Banit), Dennis Levitt, John Ryan, Chairman, Honorable Patricia Egan Jones, Philip Rowan, CEO and Executive Director, and Captain Walter Urban, USN (Ret.), Vice-Chairman.*

*Dr. Thomas Banit expresses his appreciation for recognition of his service to the Battleship New Jersey Oral History Program by the Board of Trustees of the ship during remarks aboard BB - 62 at Veterans Day ceremonies, November 11, 2014. At the podium is Philip Rowan, CEO and Executive Director of the Battleship New Jersey.*

*Dr. Thomas Banit displays the Certificate of Appreciation he received from the Board of Trustees of the Battleship New Jersey for his service as founder and Director of the Battleship New Jersey Oral History Program.*

*Dr. Thomas Banit, founder and retiring director of the Oral History Program of the Battleship New Jersey discusses the program with CDR Paul Stillwell, USN (ret.), noted naval historian and author of the book, The Battleship New Jersey: An Illustrated History. Stillwell was a featured speaker at Veterans Day ceremonies on the Battleship on November 11, 2014.*

*CDR Paul Stillwell, USN (ret.), sitting in his former stateroom on the ship.*
*He served as a Lieutenant during the ships Vietnam War period of service.*

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## Opening of the Long Awaited Vietnam War Exhibit

*Excerpts from a Press Release for this Event*

The USS New JerseyTs third commissioning service in 1968 and 1969 during the Vietnam War is distinct because she was the only active battleship in the world at that time. A new exhibit titled "A Dreadnaught in Vietnam," highlights the exploits of the USS New Jersey during her Vietnam service.

Come explore the battleshipTs historic role in Vietnam, including several objects from the personal collection of Admiral J. Edward Snyder, Jr., the battleshipTs commanding officer during her Vietnam deployment. Many of these objects have never been on public display before.

An example of the one-of-a-kind objects part of the Admiral J. Edward Snyder, Jr. collection on exhibit is the original commissioning pennant from the April 6, 1968 Re-Commissioning Ceremony. Other New Jersey veterans have also loaned items for the exhibit including Bert Trottier who was the battleshipTs bugler during Vietnam. In fact, Trottier was the last bugler in the U.S. Navy, and his jacket is part of this exhibit. Trottier personalized this jacket with memories of his Navy career, including time spent with the battleship and places the Southeast Asia cruise had taken him.

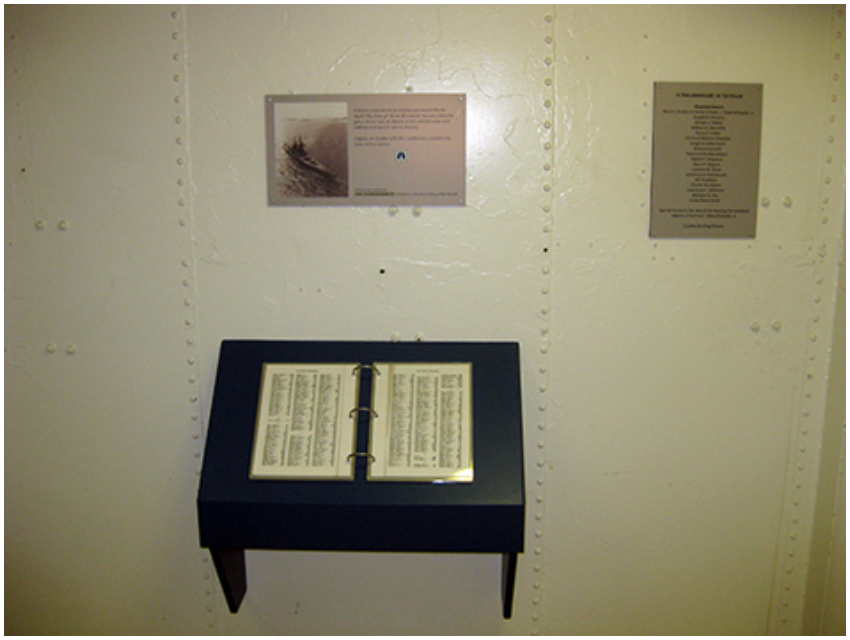
The exhibit also includes items from the BattleshipTs own vast collections. One such rarity is a section of the six inch armored deck that was removed during the reactivation process for Vietnam. The thickness and weight of this piece illustrates how well parts of the battleship were protected. Coincidentally, the piece weighs approximately sixty-two pounds, which is the hull number of Battleship New Jersey, or УBB-62.Ф

Many of the items on display are documents, booklets, and pamphlets that contain far more information inside them, but are behind glass out of the reach to guests. To enable guests to further explore these items, the exhibit includes two УflipbooksФ containing reproductions of these documents in order to get a closer look at objects in the exhibit cases as well as additional material and images not on display.

The new Vietnam exhibit can be experienced as part of the Fire Power tour of the Battleship, available Saturdays and Sundays, as well as Nov. 28, in November and December. The Battleship is open for walk-up tours from 9:30am to 3pm.

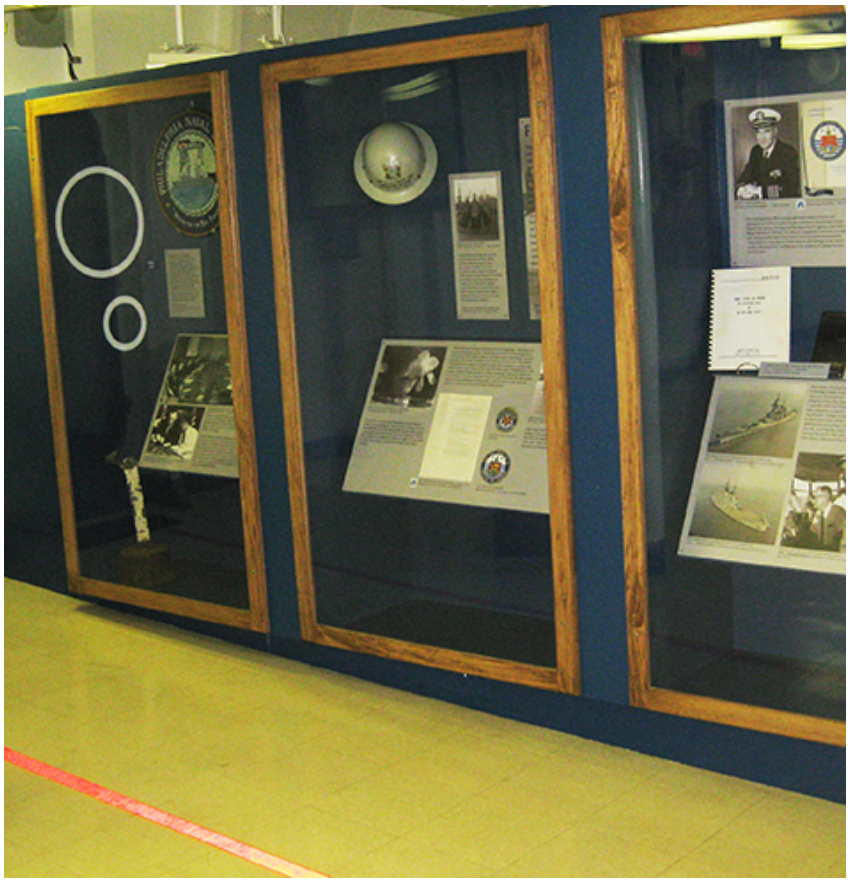
*Vietnam Exhibit Photo 1*

*Vietnam Exhibit Photo 2*



*Vietnam Exhibit Photo 3*

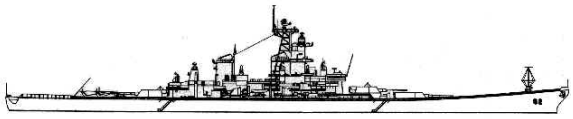
*Vietnam Exhibit Photo 4*



*Vietnam Exhibit Photo 5*

*Vietnam Exhibit Photo 6*

*Vietnam Exhibit Photo 7*



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